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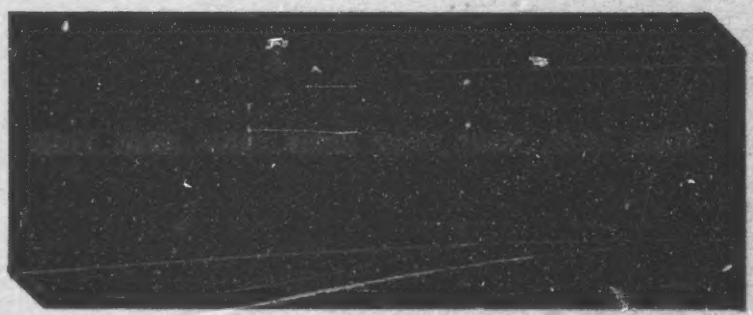
ABSTRACT

This paper examines the perceptions of state agency vocational rehabilitation counselors and supervisors in regard to the values they attach to present inservice education programs and to supervision. Subjects were 282 rehabilitation counselors and 64 supervisors employed in state and federal vocational rehabilitation programs in Iowa, Illinois, and Minnesota, all of whom completed a questionnaire. The study considered two variables, amount and type of training, in determining whether "trained" and "untrained" vocational rehabilitation counselors and supervisors differed in their evaluations of present inservice education programs and supervisory consultation. Results indicate a significant difference in the perceptions held by trained vocational rehabilitation counselors and untrained supervisors with respect to the value of inservice training in job performance. Both trained and untrained counselors perceived their current inservice programs as more helpful in the performance of their jobs than did trained and untrained supervisors. (Author)

# RESEARCH REPORT



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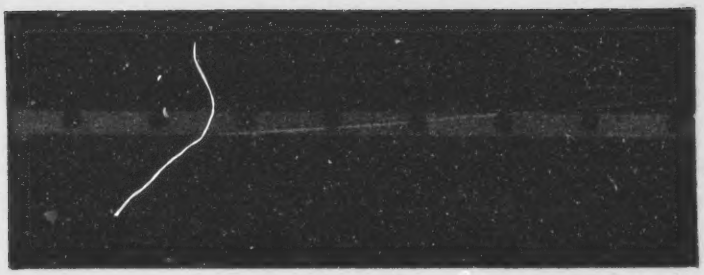

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# COUNSELORS' AND SUPERVISORS' PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

Bill K. Richardson and C. Esco Obermann

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# Counselors' and Supervisors' Perceptions of Professional Development Practices

Bill K. Richardson C. Esco Obermann

The growing importance of inservice education for rehabilitation counselors and for persons with assigned supervisory duties has come about in consequence of a rapid growth in the numbers of such persons and of the broadening scope of responsibilities they must carry. With the expansion in recent years of rehabilitation programs authorized in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, counselors and their supervisors in the State-Federal vocational rehabilitation agencies are experiencing an unusual growth in number of clients, and are being required to accomodate clients whose problems are of such a nature that they demand more professional knowledge and skills.

If rehabilitation counselors are to continue to provide leadership in giving services to clients, it is necessary that each counselor and supervisor achieve and maintain a high level of professional knowledge and skill. With a majority of counselors not fully academically trained when recruited, with only an estimated 30 percent or less of rehabilitation counselors fully qualified by academic training and experience (Muthard, et al., 1966), with equivocal evidence regarding the relationship of rehabilitation counselor effectiveness and graduate training

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(Carkhuff and Truax, 1965; Johnson and Koch, 1969), and with the cited deficit in knowledge and skills in the supervisory echelons of State-Federal agencies (Margolin and Sostek, 1968), some practical means for attaining and maintaining a satisfactory level of competence is needed.

Inservice training, provided in vocational rehabilitation agencies appears to be strongly indicated. In most cases, this will call for agencies to evaluate their current inservice training and supervisory practices, in light of the changing technical skills and knowledge demanded of counselors. Important in this evaluation will be a study of how counselors and supervisors perceive the usefulness of present inservice training opportunities and supervision practices. Such a study by each agency should permit it to clarify the specific training needs of counselors and supervisors, and to assess whether the present program fulfill those needs.

There exists little evidence in the literature to indicate how counselors and their supervisors evaluate the training that is available to them (Wright, et al., 1968), or how their varying levels of training and experience are related to these evaluations. Because supervision properly plays an important role in the inservice training of counselors, there is a need to know how counselors, and supervisors perceive inservice training and supervision. There is also need to know the extent to which the level of formal training and the professional work experience of counselors or supervisors are associated with how they perceive the inservice training and supervision provided in their agencies. There has been a lack of information which might reveal what effect, if any,

supervisory training or experience has on how supervisors view opportunities for professional growth through inservice training, and the degree to which they perceive their supervision as helpful to counselors.

The purpose of the investigation being reported here was to study the perceptions of state agency vocational rehabilitation counselors and supervisors in regard to the value they attach to present inservice education programs and to supervision.

The study considered the two variables, amount and type of training, in asking the question whether "trained" and "untrained" vocational rehabilitation counselors and supervisors differed in how they evaluated present inservice education programs and supervisory consultation.

## Method

### Sample

The data of this investigation were collected in conjunction with the initial survey phase of the University of Iowa Studies in Continuing Education for Rehabilitation Counselors (SCERC). This initial survey had as its purpose the collection of data relevant to continuing education of rehabilitation counselors and district supervisors. The 31 field offices involved in this study were selected for representativeness on the basis of such criteria as type of office (urban or rural), size of population served, size of staff, and geographic location within three midwestern states. The sample included 282 rehabilitation counselors, and 64 supervisors employed in the State-Federal vocational rehabilitation programs in Iowa, Illinois, and Minnesota. Of the supervisors, only 45 reported that inservice training was

available to them, thus reducing the size of this group with respect to this area of concern.

Research Instruments

In the initial survey, each counselor and supervisor completed a personal data blank, entitled SCERC Counselor Questionnaire, or SCERC Supervisor Questionnaire respectively. The SCERC Counselor Questionnaire contained 31 questions relative to the counselor's general background in training and employment. The SCERC Supervisor Questionnaire contained many of the same questions asked the counselors, but was modified in several instances so as to be appropriate for supervisors.

This report summarizes the responses and quantifies the differences in the responses made by "trained" and "untrained" counselors and supervisors, to the following questions or statements:

(Counselors responded to the first two, and supervisors to the last two items with "Rarely", "Sometimes", "Frequently", "Generally", or "Almost Always").

"To what extent does you supervisor help you with job-related problems?"

"The following describes the extent to which the total current inservice training program helps me in performing my job."

"To what extent do you think your consultation with counselors is of major help in solving job-related problems?"

"Which of the following describes the extent to which the current inservice training program for supervisors helps you in performing your job?"

## Procedure

The data were collected during a period of approximately five months, August through December of 1968 through scheduled visits to the agencies. Thereafter, data were collected on newly employed counselors and supervisors by a specially trained research helper-secretary in each field office.

The counselors and supervisors were grouped according to the amount and type of education as follows:

Trained Counselor: Counselor with a graduate degree in rehabilitation counseling, guidance and counseling, psychology, or social work.

Untrained Counselor: Counselor with either (a) no graduate study or (b) some graduate study, but in an area other than rehabilitation counseling, guidance and counseling, psychology or social work.

Trained Supervisor: Supervisor with a graduate degree in rehabilitation counseling, rehabilitation administration and supervision, guidance and counseling, psychology or social work.

Untrained Supervisor: Supervisor with either (a) no graduate study, or (b) some graduate study, but in an area other than rehabilitation counseling, rehabilitation administration and supervision, guidance and counseling, psychology or social work.

## Analysis

Chi square analysis, employing tests of independence, was used to analyze the data. Within the counselor and supervisor categories the respondents were grouped according to amount of education and type of education into the "trained"

and "untrained" classifications. Tests of significance of differences were made of the group differences in frequency for a given response to the items quoted above. The minimal level of significance acceptable was the .05 level of confidence.

Because of the relatively small number of subjects in the supervisor group (trained N = 17; untrained N = 28), especially in comparisons made with the counselor group (N = 282), the expected frequencies for certain response categories were observed to be below that recommended for the statistical treatment used (Walker and Lev, 1953). For this reason when the latter situation occurred and the logic of the questionnaire items permitted response categories were combined to increase the expected frequencies in the cells. In these comparisons involving the sub-groups of supervisors, or sub-groups of counselors and supervisors, the five response categories pertaining to either inservice training or supervision consultation were regrouped into three categories: (Rarely-Sometimes), (Frequently), (Generally-Almost Always). Thus, 2 x 3 contingency tables were used to test eight hypotheses, and 2 x 5 contingency tables were used to test six additional hypotheses dealing with the subjects' perceptions of inservice training and supervisory consultation.

## Results

### Inservice Training: Counselors and Supervisors

The results revealed a significant difference in the perceptions held by trained vocational rehabilitation counselors and untrained supervisors with respect to the value of inservice training in job performance ($\chi^2_{.01} = 10.13$, d.f. = 2). Also, a significant difference was found in the perceptions of untrained counselors

Table 1

Percent and Chi Square for Frequency of Responses by Rehabilitation Counselors and Supervisors of Varying Levels of Training Regarding the Perceived Helpfulness of Total Current In-service Training to the Counselor in Performing his job

| Degrees of | Counselors | | | Supervisors | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived | Trained | Untrained | Total | Trained | Untrained | Total |
| Helpfulness | (N=81) | (N=188) | (N=282)[a] | (N=17) | (N=28) | (N=64)[b] |
| Rarely | 6.2 | 6.4 | 6.3 | 17.6 | 0.0 | 6.7 |
| Sometimes | 34.5 | 25.5 | 28.2 | 41.2 | 39.3 | 40.0 |
| Frequently | 30.9 | 22.9 | 25.3 | 29.4 | 21.4 | 24.4 |
| Generally | 18.5 | 26.6 | 24.2 | 11.8 | 28.6 | 22.2 |
| Almost Always | 9.9 | 18.6 | 16.0 | 0.0 | 10.7 | 6.7 |

| | Chi Square |
|---|---|
| Counselors vs Supervisors | 4.15 |
| Counselors, Trained vs Untrained | 7.35 |
| [c]Supervisors, Trained vs Untrained | 5.44 |
| [c]Trained Counselors vs Trained Supervisors | 2.58 |
| [c]Trained Counselors vs Untrained Supervisors | 10.13* |
| [c]Untrained Counselors vs Trained Supervisors | 7.91* |
| [c]Untrained Counselors vs Untrained Supervisors | 3.56 |

[a]13 Counselors did not respond to questions

[b]19 Supervisors did not respond to questions

[c]Response categories collapsed into 2x3 tables

*P < .01 (2 d. f.)

and trained supervisors regarding inservice training ($\chi^2_{.01} = 7.91$, d.f. = 2). As the findings indicate in Table 1, no other comparisons provided statistically significant differences in perception of the value of inservice training.

Supervisory Consultation: Counselors and Supervisors

The results revealed a significant difference in the perceptions held by counselors and by supervisors included in this study concerning the value of the supervisory consultation provided rehabilitation counselors, ($\chi^2_{.05} = 10.83$, d.f. = 4). A difference of significant level was also found between the perceptions held by trained vocational rehabilitation counselors and trained supervisors ($\chi^2_{.01} = 9.00$, d.f. = 2), and between trained counselors and those held by untrained supervisors concerning the effectiveness of supervisory consultation provided counselors ($\chi^2_{.05} = 10.89$, d.f. = 4).

The findings presented in Table 2 indicate that no other group comparisons yielded significant differences in perception of the value of supervisory consultation.

Discussion

Inspection of the data revealed that both trained and untrained counselors perceived their current inservice training programs as helpful in the performance of their jobs more frequently than did untrained and trained supervisors. Statistically significant differences emerged, however, only when cross comparisons of the above sub-groups were made. Since 19 out of the 64 supervisors in the sample reported that no inservice training for supervisors was offered in their agencies, it might be assumed that such training for the remaining 45 surveyed here may have been quite limited in scope. If supervisors place little emphasis on inservice

Table 2

Percent and Chi Square for Frequency of Responses by Rehabilitation Counselors and Supervisors of Varying Levels of Training Regarding the Extent to Which Supervisor Consultation is perceived as of Major Help to the Counselor in Solving Job Related Problems.

| Degrees of | Counselors | | | Supervisors | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Perceived | Trained | Untrained | Total | Trained | Untrained | Total |
| Helpfulness | (N=84) | (N=193) | (N=282)[a] | (N=25) | (N=36) | (N=64)[b] |
| Rarely | 14.3 | 7.2 | 9.4 | 0.0 | 2.8 | 1.6 |
| Sometimes | 27.4 | 22.3 | 23.9 | 16.0 | 16.7 | 16.4 |
| Frequently | 23.8 | 33.2 | 30.3 | 40.0 | 30.6 | 34.4 |
| Generally | 10.7 | 16.1 | 14.4 | 24.0 | 30.5 | 27.9 |
| Almost Always | 23.8 | 21.2 | 22.0 | 20.0 | 19.4 | 19.7 |

| | Chi Square |
|---|---|
| Counselors vs Supervisors | 10.83* |
| Counselors Trained vs Untrained | 6.73 |
| [c]Supervisors, Trained vs Untrained | 0.59 |
| [c]Trained Counselors vs Trained Supervisors | 9.00** |
| Trained Counselors vs Untrained Supervisors | 10.89* |
| [c]Untrained Counselors vs Trained Supervisors | 3.37 |
| Untrained Counselors vs Untrained Supervisors | 4.97 |

[a]5 counselors did not respond to questions.

[b]3 supervisors did not respond to questions.

[c]Response categories collapsed into 2 x 3 Tables.

*P < .05 (4 d.f.) **P < .01 (2 d.f.)

training, this may well be in response to indifferent demand and relatively low evaluations characteristic of their trained personnel in the present data.

Out of the 45 supervisors responding on the inservice training item, 28 were in the untrained category, a reflection of the many untrained persons holding supervisory positions in rehabilitation agencies. Contrary to the hypothesis that trained supervisors may tend to possess the necessary positive attitudes to set the pattern for and influence rehabilitation counselor's attitudes toward this type of professional development, the data reveals a tendency favoring the untrained supervisors. The question arises as to the extent of real responsibility granted to the supervisors for training counselors under their direction. The typical practice of "home offices" of the agencies taking direct responsibility to the upgrading of counselors may omit or inhibit the development of leadership qualities in supervisors.

Within the counselor group it was also hypothesized that trained counselors would assign inservice training higher ratings than untrained counselors due to their greater motivation and a better understanding of the need for the type of professional development made available through inservice training and supervisory consultation activities (Jaques, 1959). Although there was no significant difference in groups, inspection of the data reveal a tendency in the opposite direction in the present study.

Some of the lack of "structure" and differentiation in attitudes toward inservice training might be related to the "too profuse" exposure to inservice training reported in most State-Federal agencies (Harbridge House, Inc., 1963),

the sporadic use of reports on counselor performance by rehabilitation agencies in establishing goals (Muthard and Miller, 1966), or to the general lack of means for measuring the effectiveness of continuing education programs in satisfying counselors', supervisors', and needs of agencies (Miller and Obermann, 1969).

Since the majority of supervisors had advanced to their present positions after working as counselors, it was hypothesized that their perception of helpfulness of supervisory consultation with counselors in solving job-related problems would not differ from counselors' perception. The significant difference which emerged indicated that supervisors valued as helpful such consultations to a greater degree and counselors to a lesser degree. Perhaps these results reflect a lack of consensus on the part of these two groups as to the objectives of supervision, the supervisor regarding such consultations from an "agency-administration orientation" while the counselor regards them more appropriately from a "counselor-problem orientation" (Harmon and Arnold, 1960).

Moreover, when these groups were subdivided into trained vs untrained categories, trained counselors differed significantly from both trained supervisors and untrained supervisors in their perception of the value of supervision. Inspection of the data revealed that the trained counselors perceived supervisory consultation for solving job-related problems to be of less help than did either of the subgroups of supervisors. It would appear that in the present sample the supervisor may very well have been quite unhelpful in their supervision approach. This finding does not correspond with the assumption in rehabilitation counselor education that the counselor trained at the Master's level in vocational rehabilitation

counseling will tend to be more understanding of the purposes of supervision, and will be oriented toward the need for supervision. Clearly, the expectations of this sample of trained counselors seem to be going largely unmet in many instances as inspection of the data reveals. The finding suggests that supervision be based on the trained counselor's expectations (Gysbers and Johnson, 1965), in order that the counselor's professional growth can be provided for in part as well as his job satisfaction (Smits and Aiken, 1969). In this approach, the counselor is more likely to regard supervision as more valuable to his job performance.

## Implications

If assessment of attitudes of rehabilitation agency personnel can be accepted as one means of evaluating inservice education programs, then the results reported here have some possible implications for training of supervisors and counselors. With the growth in the range of services and rehabilitation clientele, both supervisors and counselors should be trained in expanded curricula. There should be enough overlap in their training for each to learn and appreciate the developmental needs, expectations, and values of the other. To effect optimal mutual facilitation of professional attitudes and competencies, practicing, employed supervisors should participate in early pre-practicum, practicum and internship experiences of counselor students in rehabilitation settings. Designers of rehabilitation counselor training programs should participate in the inservice training of supervisors to insure compatibility of goals and expectations.

Inservice training should emphasize not only the enhancement of technical competencies but should also be designed to meet both the counselors' and

supervisors' needs for and to provide the means to achieve continuing concept development (Miller and Obermann, 1969), to help them to acquire positive attitudes toward professional development (O'Hara, 1968), to facilitate their self-assessment and self-understanding (Swartz, 1968), and to clarify definitions of counselor roles in increasing services' effectiveness. Some strategies suggested included inservice training based on experiential teaching formats and self-instruction units which would permit agency personnel to progress at their individual optimum rates of development (Engelkes and Roberts, 1970). Such an approach would offer the potential of more effective inservice education, and in turn, the increased possibility of more effective counselors and supervisors. Short-term training programs for experienced counselors (Truax and Lister, 1971), and long-term development-oriented inservice training for supervision of counselors (Gladstein, 1970), and work-study programs (Sieracki, 1968) offer other potential means of implementing inservice training and supervision which might be effective and might be perceived as effective by their recipients.

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